



# **Hult International Business School, London**

## Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight

Review by the Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education

**February 2012**

## About this report

This is a report of a review under the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Hult International Business School, London. The review took place on 21 February 2012 and was conducted by a panel, as follows:

- Dr Stephen Ryrie
- Mr Alan Hunt
- Mr Lee Smith.

The main purpose of the review was to:

- make judgements about the provider's delegated responsibilities for the management of academic standards and the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities
- draw a conclusion about whether the provider's public information is reliable
- report on any features of good practice
- make recommendations for action.

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 3. The [context](#) in which these findings should be interpreted is explained on page 5. [Explanations](#) of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>1</sup> More information about this review method can be found in the [published handbook](#).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/eo-recognition-scheme.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/eo-recognition-scheme.aspx)

## Key findings

The QAA panel considered evidence relating to the educational provision at Hult International Business School, London (Hult London), both information supplied in advance and evidence gathered during the visits of the review itself. The review has resulted in the key findings stated in this section.

## Judgements

The QAA panel formed the following judgements about Hult International Business School, London:

- **confidence** that Hult International Business School, London effectively discharges its responsibilities for the management of academic standards
- **confidence** that Hult International Business School, London effectively discharges its responsibilities for the management of the quality of the learning opportunities which it makes available to students.

## Conclusion about public information

The QAA panel concluded that:

- **reliance can** be placed on the public information that Hult London supplies about itself.

## Good practice

The QAA panel identified the following **features of good practice** at Hult International Business School, London:

- Learning, Experience and Action Projects (LEAP) make a valuable and significant contribution to the quality of learning (paragraph 2.5)
- Hult London has a notably strong range of structures providing high-quality support for students (paragraph 2.8).

## Recommendations

The QAA panel makes the following recommendations to Hult International Business School, London.

It is **advisable** for Hult International Business School, London to:

- formalise and fully document its quality assurance processes, particularly for programme and course approval, review and modification (paragraph 1.4)
- fully document and consistently apply its procedures for the setting and grading of students' assessed work (paragraph 1.6)
- establish, document and consistently apply clear and equitable policy and procedures for treatment of assessment submission deadlines (paragraph 1.7)
- clarify and document the external reference points used in setting the academic standards of its undergraduate programmes (paragraph 1.9).

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It is **desirable** for Hult International Business School, London to:

- extend teaching observation to all programmes (paragraph 2.7)
- formalise a staff development plan to support the scholarship base of its academic staff (paragraph 2.11).

## Context

Hult International Business School (the School) is a not-for-profit institution based in Boston, USA. It awards US degrees accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), one of the six regional accrediting bodies in the USA. In addition to its main campus in Boston, the School offers its programmes on branch campuses in San Francisco, London, Dubai and Shanghai.

The School has offered complete programmes of study, leading to its own awards, at its London campus since 1990. In 2011, it applied for QAA's educational oversight of its London operation (Hult London) as a US degree awarding institution operating in the UK.

NEASC accredits the School against its 11 standards, with self-assessment and inspection scheduled every five years, and additional self-study and inspection any time Hult informs NEASC of a 'substantive change' (such as a new campus location). This accreditation extends to the School's operation and provision in London. NEASC's last full accreditation report on Hult London was published in 2009.

Because Hult International Business School is accredited by a regional accreditation body (NEASC), its degrees are recognised by UK NARIC as being equivalent in level to UK degrees.

As a US degree awarding institution, Hult London uses the NEASC Standards for Accreditation as its key reference points in setting academic standards and establishing the quality of provision. The NEASC standards, most recently updated in 2011, are available at [http://cihe.neasc.org/standards\\_policies/standards/standards\\_html\\_version](http://cihe.neasc.org/standards_policies/standards/standards_html_version).

Hult London is also accredited by the British Accreditation Council (BAC). The most recent accreditation report was made in 2011.

Hult London's MBA programme is accredited by the Association of MBAs (AMBA). The most recent accreditation report was made in 2011.

In 2010-11 Hult London had a total of 632 students enrolled, of whom 431 were from outside the UK/EU. At the time of this review, the following programmes were offered:

- Master of Business Administration (MBA)
- Master of International Business (MIB)
- Master of Digital Marketing (MDM)
- Master of Arts in International Relations (MA IR)
- Bachelor of Science in Business (BS Business)
- Bachelor of Arts in International Relations (BA IR)
- Bachelor of Arts in Communications (BA Comms).

## Detailed findings

### 1 Academic standards

#### **How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?**

1.1 The School is responsible for the design and content of all its programmes, wherever delivered, within the standards defined by NEASC. Its postgraduate programmes are designed to be consistent with accepted international standards in business education, but the review panel saw no evidence of this for undergraduate programmes.

1.2 The School attaches importance to ensuring equivalence of academic standards across its five campuses with a view to securing equivalence of standards across its provision. For its postgraduate provision, it has established a system of internal scrutiny in order to assure this equivalence, and the review panel heard that this requires assessment tasks set at each campus to be reviewed by an academic at another campus before being released to students. An informal system operates for its undergraduate provision in London, and the review panel encourages Hult London to institute a formal system for review of assessment tasks (see also paragraph 1.6).

1.3 The School's key bodies responsible for assuring the standards of its awards are the (global) Academic Standards Committee and the (global) Curriculum Committee. The review panel found evidence of careful consideration at the Curriculum Committee of curriculum planning and of planning for forthcoming external accreditation. Although they found that the Academic Standards Committee had devoted little attention to consideration of academic standards across the School's campuses, failing to find evidence of (for instance) consideration of student achievement or responses to termly course reports, the panel also noted that consideration of student achievement and course reports was carried out effectively by the Hult London Campus Dean. A Hult London Academic Standards Committee plays a key role in considering the assessment of students with exceptional circumstances and in developing practice in accordance with the School's policies.

1.4 However, the review panel found that the purpose, responsibilities and reporting arrangements of committees, and the School's quality processes, were not documented in detail. Some academic staff were unable to articulate clearly the processes for the approval of new provision and of modifications to existing provision. The panel advises Hult London to formalise and document its quality processes, particularly those for programme and course approval and modification, so that it can fulfil more effectively its responsibilities for the management of academic standards and quality (see also paragraph 2.2).

1.5 Within the context of the criteria set by NEASC, the School relies on its global policies and systems to manage academic standards across its five campuses. These are set out in the Academic Manual given to all staff of the School. Consistent measurement of student achievement is supported by generic grade descriptors, the internal examination of assessment tasks on postgraduate courses, and the informal system of moderation of assessment grades carried out by campus deans. The School's policy for grading of assessments includes elements of both criterion referencing and norm referencing, the former being expressed in the form of grade descriptors and the latter in the form of guidance to instructors concerning the proportion of students whose work should receive grades at A or A-. Although conscious of potential tension between criterion and norm referencing, the review panel noted the explicitly defined context within which norm referencing is intended to be used, and considered that this was a helpful reference point to instructors in the implementation of grading policy.

1.6 The review panel heard that it is common for an instructor to ask a colleague to review samples of marking of assessed work, but on an informal basis. Hult London is advised to ensure that its procedures for the setting and grading of students' assessed work are fully documented and consistently implemented (see paragraph 1.2).

1.7 Each instructor has authority to establish assessment criteria and to evaluate and grade students' performance. The freedom granted by this policy is appropriately moderated by the use of team-teaching, by a system of internal examination of assessment tasks, and by the role of the Campus Dean in reviewing the grades awarded in each module. Instructors have discretion to interpret policy on the use of assignment deadlines for the submission of assessed work and to reduce grades awarded for work submitted after a deadline. However, this leads to variable practice, so to ensure fairness the provider is advised to establish, document and consistently apply clear and equitable policy and procedures for treatment of assessment submission deadlines.

### **How effectively are external reference points used in the management of academic standards?**

1.8 The NEASC Standards for Accreditation provide the benchmark for all Hult degrees. NEASC's most recent review of provision at the Hult London campus took place in 2009 and concluded that the curricula for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes meet NEASC general education requirements. The QAA review panel noted evidence of Hult London's responsiveness to issues raised by NEASC, particularly those relating to the standards of awards identified in letters from the Commission in January 2010 and November 2011.

1.9 Although Hult London states that it has adopted the degree qualification descriptors of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the review panel was provided with no evidence that these descriptors had been used in designing programmes. However, Hult London makes use of the experience and judgement of staff at other campuses in setting and maintaining the standards of its postgraduate provision, but not for undergraduate provision. Bearing in mind the view expressed by NEASC in its Accreditation Report 2009 that the provider's undergraduate provision was 'still fragile', Hult London is advised to clarify and document the external reference points used in setting the academic standards of its undergraduate programmes.

1.10 The School's MBA provision is accredited by the Association of MBAs (AMBA). This accreditation has been reconfirmed most recently in 2011, and the review panel found no evidence that the School has responded to issues raised by AMBA accreditation visits.

### **How effectively does the provider use external scrutiny of assessment processes to assure academic standards (where applicable)?**

1.11 Hult London makes no formal or explicit use of external input to its assessment processes, and as an accredited institution of NEASC it is not required to do so.

The panel has **confidence** in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the awards to be conferred by its awarding organisations.

## **2 Quality of learning opportunities**

### **How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities?**

2.1 Hult London is responsible to the School for the management of the quality of learning opportunities offered to its students, including the provision of teaching and support staff, teaching accommodation and learning resources. The London campus is managed by an Executive Director, supported by the Campus Dean, the Director of Career Services and Corporate Development, the Director of Operations, Policy and Compliance, and the Director of Operations and Campus Management. The School's Vice-President for Academic Affairs, while based in Boston, is actively and directly involved in the oversight of provision at Hult London. The management team has a clear vision for the development of its London provision.

2.2 Hult London's senior managers annually monitor the quality of learning opportunities offered to students by making use of metrics derived from student feedback, including student satisfaction with the teaching of individual instructors, and graduate employment data. While lacking formal periodic review systems (see also paragraph 1.4) Hult London relies heavily on NEASC's reviews, to which it responds effectively. For example, in response to NEASC's request, it has strengthened the support for its provision by developing its management structure and substantially increasing, over several years, its budgets for academic affairs, student affairs and careers services.

### **How effectively are external reference points used in monitoring and evaluation processes?**

2.3 Hult London uses the accreditation standards of NEASC as its key reference points for establishing the quality of its provision, and in its most recent Five-year Self-study Report (January 2012) it has evaluated its provision against these standards. It has also responded appropriately to recommendations made in BAC Accreditation reports in 2009 and 2011. Hult London's view is that its provision is effective in equipping students with the knowledge and skills required for successful completion of its programmes, and the review panel found evidence from students, staff and internal documentation to confirm this.

### **How effectively does the provider assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?**

2.4 Hult London has recognised the need to strengthen academic leadership for teaching and learning, and has decided to appoint a Discipline Lead for each of its six main disciplines. Not all had been appointed at the time of the review, but their role will be to ensure the quality and uniformity of course content and delivery, to mentor new instructors and to spread good practice in teaching. Having met the first of these discipline leads, the review panel concluded that these appointments were potentially valuable in strengthening the Hult London's assurance of the quality of teaching and learning.

2.5 The School has taken steps to strengthen its approach to teaching based on Action Learning for postgraduate programmes and on Action Projects for undergraduate programmes. Learning, Experience and Action Projects (LEAP) were introduced in 2011-12; these involve team-teaching, guest speakers, practical workshops and corporate feedback and are regarded as an effective initiative by students and teaching staff. The LEAP initiative is supported by the Action Learning Coordinator who contacts businesses for potential student projects. The LEAP approach makes a valuable and significant contribution to the quality of learning at Hult London and is identified by the panel as a feature of good practice.



2.6 The review panel noted that the School has an explicit policy of recruiting only well qualified and experienced teaching staff, and students commended the wide academic and professional experience of teaching staff. The review panel noted the detailed level of advice and statements of School policy in the Academic Manual, and considered this to be a valuable source of guidance to instructors.

2.7 Observation of teaching is carried out on undergraduate programmes, and staff described it as helpful. It was not clear to the panel why this effective process was not used for master's programmes, and the review panel considers it desirable that Hult London should extend teaching observation to all its programmes.

### **How effectively does the provider assure itself that students are appropriately supported?**

2.8 The quality and range of support offered by Hult London was seen by students as a significant strength. Students drew particular attention to the support offered prior to entry and arrival, to the orientation programme and the quality of information provided in induction packs, and to the provision for students with particular needs such as additional English language tuition. One-to-one support is offered by instructors, and academic advisers are appointed for all undergraduate students. Effective careers advice and guidance, including one-to-one careers coaching, is offered by the Careers Service, whose staff are members of the MBA Career Services Council and subscribe to its professional standards. The review panel regarded Hult London's range of structures providing high quality support for students as a feature of good practice.

2.9 The review panel heard evidence from both students and teaching staff that the School enjoys a strong culture of listening and responding to the student voice. Effective use is made of student evaluations at the end of each course, and 'town hall' meetings to allow students to express collective views.

### **How effective are the provider's arrangements for staff development in relation to maintaining and/or enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?**

2.10 Hult London provides development opportunities for teaching staff by supporting attendance at conferences, particularly the annual Hult Global Faculty Summit; annual appraisal, which includes discussion of feedback from student course evaluations; support and mentoring for new staff, which is effective albeit informal; and peer observation of teaching on undergraduate courses.

2.11 Staffing policy is currently undergoing a transition to a hybrid model of staffing with the aim of establishing a significant number of full-time teaching staff with doctoral qualifications. This development is designed to address a concern expressed by NEASC relating to a 'lack of requirements related to faculty scholarship'. It should also allow Hult London, as it seeks accreditation by the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), to address the importance attached to scholarship and research by that body. These positive and constructive intentions for staffing and staff development should be more explicitly documented; hence it is desirable that Hult London should formalise a staff development plan to support the scholarship base of its academic staff.

### **How effectively does the provider ensure that students have access to learning resources that are sufficient to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programmes?**

2.12 Hult London aims to offer excellent learning infrastructures and resources to its students. The student population at the London campus has markedly grown over the past

five years. The School's strategic response is to create separate campuses for undergraduate and postgraduate provision, increasing the physical resources available to each. Its new Postgraduate Campus provides high quality study space, social space and classrooms equipped with audio-visual equipment. Undergraduate provision remains a short distance away in older accommodation.

2.13 In order to provide improved access to library resources, Hult London has arranged for its students to use the library of Birkbeck College, including borrowing rights. Students regard this provision as being adequate and convenient.

The panel has **confidence** that Hult International Business School, London is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the learning opportunities it provides for students.

### 3 Public information

#### How effective are the provider's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing?

3.1 Hult London is responsible for the content of the brochure which describes the provision offered at this campus. The brochure, which is updated annually, sets out the curricula, entry requirements, admissions procedures and the academic calendar for its programmes. Much of this information is also available on the School's website.

3.2 Hult London has acknowledged that the rapid growth in its academic provision and its student population require stronger oversight of the content and quality of published information, and accepts that there are specific areas for improvement. Student submissions gave mixed views of the accuracy of published information; some drew attention to a 'disconnect' between the reality of provision and published information, but noted that the provider has quickly and effectively moved to resolve issues once attention was drawn to them.

3.3 The School has made significant efforts to ensure the uniformity and accuracy of published information, including a school-wide review of marketing material, as a result of which its brochures for 2012 entry are of uniformly good quality in their presentation of all five campuses. Recent student surveys show increasing student satisfaction with the School's public information.

The panel concludes that **reliance can be placed** on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

## 4 Action plan

Hult International Business School, London action plan relating to the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight February 2012						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The panel identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the provider:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning, Experience and Action Projects (LEAP) make a valuable and significant contribution to the quality of learning (paragraph 2.5)</li> </ul>	Accelerate the transition to LEAP so as to encompass a greater number of courses	October 2012	Vice-President for Academic Affairs	Increased number of syllabi showing Action Project use.	Curriculum Committee	Analysis of student feedback via satisfaction survey and Curriculum Committee review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hult London has a notably strong range of structures providing high-quality support for students (paragraph 2.8).</li> </ul>	Maintain the services provided by these structures to encompass additional cohorts and programmes	October 2012	Campus Dean	Documented examples of student support structures beyond the London campus (clubs, actions, processes)	Executive Director	Analysis of student feedback via satisfaction survey/Hult Student Association Minutes
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The panel considers that it is <b>advisable</b> for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>formalise and fully document its quality</li> </ul>	Provide expanded documentation of	April 2012	Vice-President for Academic	Academic Governance	Curriculum Committee	Review by Chief Academic Officer

assurance processes, particularly for programme and course approval, review and modification (paragraph 1.4)	academic governance process		Affairs	Statement included in Faculty Handbook		and analysis of student feedback via satisfaction survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fully document and consistently apply its procedures for the setting and grading of students' assessed work (paragraph 1.6)</li> </ul>	Define procedures for setting and grading assessed work	October 2012	Global Dean	Expanded procedures incorporated into Faculty Handbook	Academic Standards Committee	Review by Chief Academic Officer and analysis of student feedback via satisfaction survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establish, document and consistently apply clear and equitable policy and procedures for treatment of assessment submission deadlines (paragraph 1.7)</li> </ul>	Define uniform policies in respect of submission deadlines and late submission penalties	October 2012	Global Dean	Clearly defined policies included in the Faculty and Student Handbooks	Academic Standards Committee	Review by Chief Academic Officer and analysis of student feedback via satisfaction survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clarify and document the external reference points used in setting the academic standards of its undergraduate programmes (paragraph 1.9).</li> </ul>	Document the external reference points used in the setting of academic standards, and the process which uses them	October 2012	Undergraduate Dean	Audit trail of benchmarking process and documented outcomes	Academic Standards Committee	Review by Chief Academic Officer

<b>Desirable</b>	<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Success indicators</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
The panel considers that it is <b>desirable</b> for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>extend teaching observation to all programmes (paragraph 2.7)</li> </ul>	Extend limited peer review process to all programmes	October 2012	Campus Dean	Faculty performance quantitatively and qualitatively measured	Chief Academic Officer and Executive Director	Analysis of feedback via student satisfaction and faculty evaluation surveys
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>formalise a staff development plan to support the scholarship base of its academic staff (paragraph 2.11).</li> </ul>	Continued development of Professional Development Allowance, Scholarship awards, Case Research Grants, Research centre	October 2012	Vice-President for Academic Affairs	Fully operational staff development plan as part of Faculty Handbook; documented grants and awards process active	President and Chief Academic Officer	Measured increase in scholarly activity and investment

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. For more details see the [handbook](#)<sup>3</sup> for this review method.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx).

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx).

**academic standards** The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

**Code of practice** *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

**credit(s)** A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

**feature of good practice** A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

**learning opportunities** The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

**learning outcome** What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

**programme (of study)** An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

**public information** Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

**widening participation** Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/eo-recognition-scheme.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/eo-recognition-scheme.aspx)

**RG 896 05/12**

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© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2012

ISBN 978 1 84979 542 5

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786